

Burial Customs at Tell Tweini – Field A

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Introduction

Since excavations started at Tell Tweini in 1999 eleven burials from both the Bronze and Iron Age have been unearthed in Field A.¹ All of these graves and tombs were found in an urban context; in most cases in a well-defined relation with domestic structures, such as floors and foundations of walls. The burials occur on various locations beneath the surface of the tell. They are a reflection of the Ancient Near Eastern tradition to bury the dead close to or beneath their proper estate. The majority, namely nine, can be dated to the Middle Bronze Age. These give a good insight on the burial customs of the period. For both the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age II only one burial has been recognised so far. As burial types simple earth inhumations (4), jar burials (5) and constructed tombs (2) have been distinguished.

Middle Bronze I

TWE-A-00954 (Ill. 1)

In the sounding of squares E3-4, F3-4 a structural tomb of a young man was found. The corbelled-vault tomb, constructed in unworked stones, had no structural entrance and was opened by the excavators from the top. The body of the 20 to 35 year old male² lay on its back with the legs pulled up to the left. The inventory only consisted of a bag-shaped juglet³, a bronze pin and a bronze ring, which was still around a finger of the left hand.

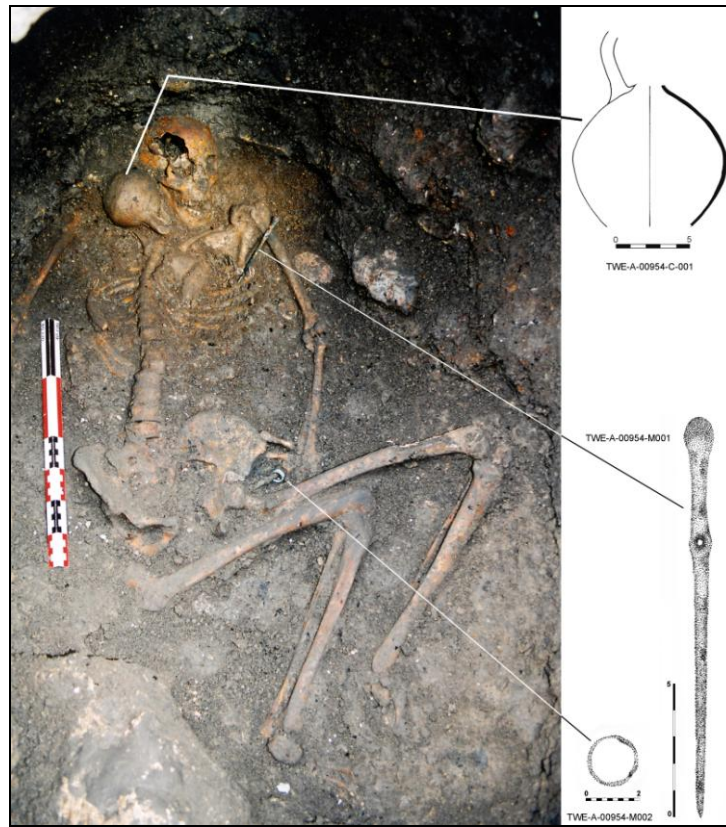
TWE-A-02544 and TWE-A-02545 (Ill. 2)

In the small sounding of square B5, 20 to 40cm lower than where the jar burials TWE-A-02542 and TWE-A-02543 were found, two simple earth burials TWE-A-02544 and TWE-A-02545 were uncovered. The limited excavated area in this sounding made it impossible to determine whether the graves were related to urban structures. The skeletons of both graves were badly preserved. TWE-A-02544 was the grave of a male child of circa 6 years old. The burial also contained a rounded juglet similar to fragments found in square E4 (TWE-A-00942-C-003) within a Middle Bronze Age I context. No ceramics were found in locus TWE-A-02545 but a silver-tin bracelet (TWE-A-02545-M-002) and five beads lay close to the neck of the 2 to 3 year old child.

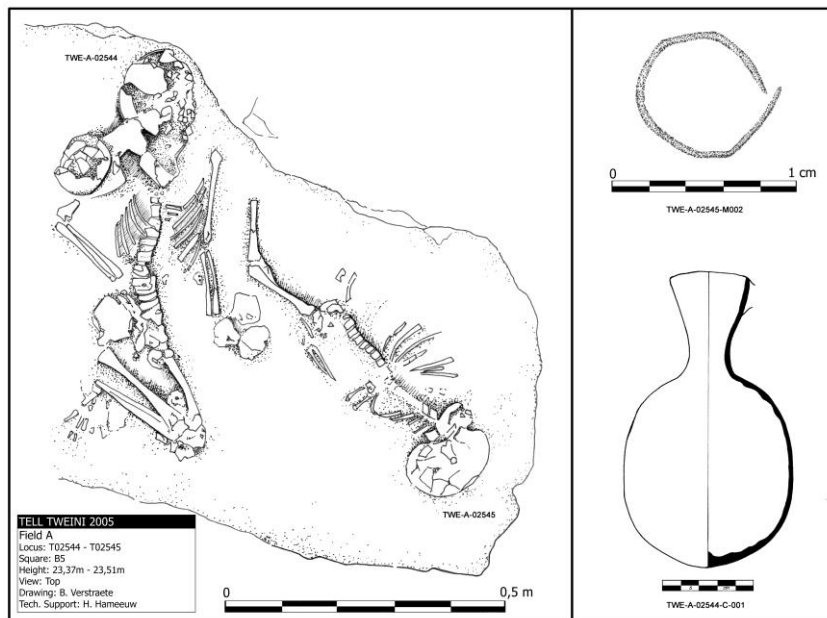
1. For the ceramic inventory of these graves: see also the article of Klaas Vansteenhuyse in this volume.

2. The anthro-biological examinations on the human remains found at Tell Tweini were conducted by F.-X. Ricaut during the 2006-2007 seasons. For the Middle Bronze Age burials see his contribution in this volume.

3. The juglet is the main chronological reference for the tomb, a parallel at Doumet-Serhal 2004, Table 7, fig. 14, S/1803.



Ill. 1. Tomb and inventory of TWE-A-00954, Middle Bronze Age I



Ill. 2. Graves and inventory of TWE-A-02544 and TWE-A-02545, Middle Bronze Age I

Middle Bronze II

TWE-A-02542 and TWE-A-02543 (Ill. 3)

In the profile of the small sounding of square B5, two jar burials were located some 60 to 70 cm below a plaster floor (TWE-A-02535). The smallest of the two jars, TWE-A-02543, was completely crushed by the earth above and could not be excavated as this would have destabilized the profile. Just above TWE-A-02542 two large slabs protected the jar, measuring 60 by 30 cm. The human remains in the jar – most likely of three different persons – were mixed and disturbed. Two intact red burnished dipper juglets, fragments of two small black slipped juglets and a bronze bracelet were found inside the jar.

TWE-A-00051 (Ill. 4)

The jar of the burial contained the remains of a child, whose body was placed in foetal position. The grave in square A2 had a rich tomb inventory, consisting of two red slipped juglets, a dipper juglet, a small carinated bowl and a red slipped plate⁴. At Ras Shamra⁵ and Tell Arqa⁶ jar burials with similar contexts dating to the Middle Bronze Age II were found.

TWE-A-01070 (Ill. 5) and TWE-A-01085

Beneath a beaten earth floor in squares D4 and E4 two jar burials of infants were excavated. The 50 cm large jar of TWE-A-01070 was seriously damaged; due to this, most of the skeletal remains were found outside of the jar. Among the ceramics found between the human remains were a Middle Bronze Age II carinated bowl and a juglet with horizontal red bands in Levantine Painted Ware. TWE-A-01085 was too disarticulated to allow thorough study; no objects could be related to this burial.

TWE-A-00934 (Ill. 6)

A most interesting simple earth burial in square F4 was positioned in direct relation with the Middle Bronze Age II foundations of wall TWE-A-00931 and just below a beaten earth floor. In the burial the body of a young female about 20 years old, was placed at the bottom of the shallow pit. Her legs were pulled up to the left and the head oriented to the north but facing east. Between her arms an infant, age 1 to 1,5 years, was laid down.⁷ Among the gifts were a juglet in the Cypriot White Painted Cross Line Style, two carinated bowls and two dipper juglets. For both TWE-A-00934-C-001 and TWE-A-00934-C-004 strong parallels were found with the jar burial of TWE-A-01070. Aside from the ceramics a small figurine and a silex tool were part of the inventory. On top of the feet of the adult skeleton the skull of a cow or ox

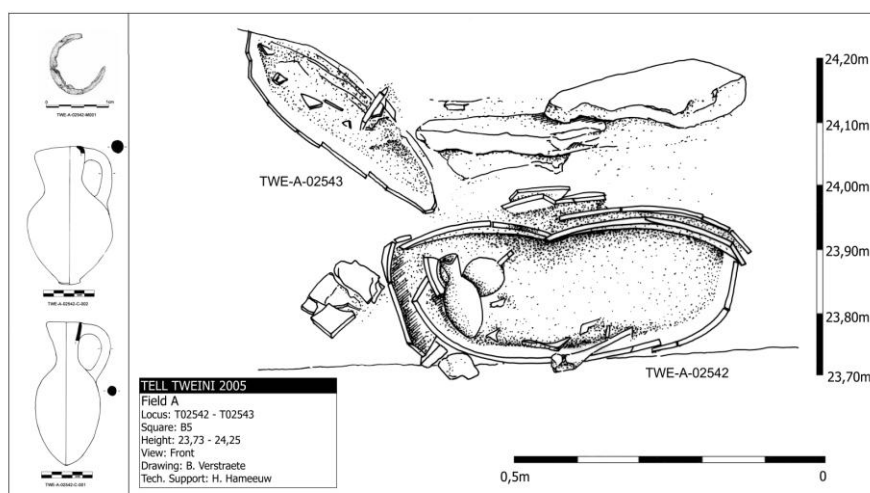
4. Bretschneider et al. 2004, 224-225.

5. Schaeffer 1962, pl. XV, fig. 5.

6. Thalmann 2006, T 13.38.

7. At Ras el-Bassit, north of Tell Tweini, in a Late Bronze Age burial context the remains of two adults (man and wife?) and those of a child were discovered. Similar to TWE-A-00932, the child was positioned close to the head of the female body, see Courbin 1978, 52-53 and Darcque 1996, 129-152. For a southern Levantine parallel, at Megiddo: a burial of a single adult with a single infant or child dating to the Middle Bronze Age II, see Loud 1948, fig. 293, tomb 3093.

was placed.⁸ Several other animal bones were found all around the grave. The woman appeared to suffer from madura foot, a bacterial or fungal infection. When this disease is not treated, it can be fatal.⁹



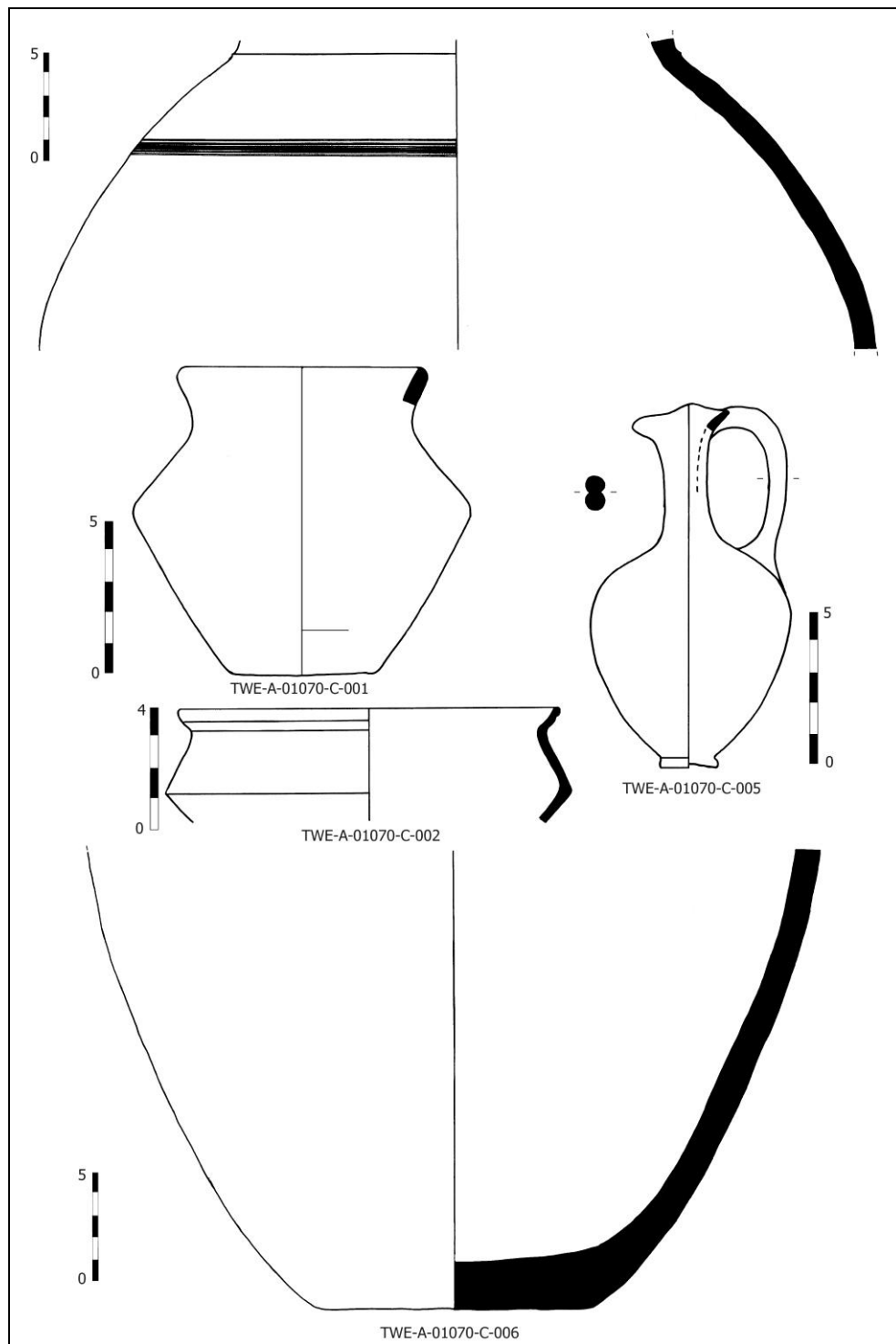
Ill. 3. Jar burial and inventory of TWE-A-02542 and TWE-A-02543, Middle Bronze Age II



Ill. 4. Jar burial and inventory of TWE-A-00051, Middle Bronze Age II

8. Thalmann 2006, 65-67, the skulls of sheep and goats were found in several adult inhumations, see Tell Aqra tombs T13.10, T13.27 and T13.31. Note the remarks on p. 67 where food offers are linked uniquely to adult inhumations.

9. See the contribution of F.-X. Ricaut in this volume.



Ill. 5. Burial jar and inventory of TWE-A-01070, Middle Bronze Age II



Ill. 6. Grave and inventory of TWE-A-00934, Middle Bronze Age II

TWE-A-00170 (Ill. 7-9)

A large constructed tomb, which stands in relation to late Middle Bronze Age II domestic structures, was revealed in squares A2-B2. The tomb received number TWE-A-00170, its inventory, both the skeletal remains and the objects, TWE-A-00177. The complex has the well known pattern of the Levantine Middle Bronze Age: shaft – dromos – burial chamber. The funerary architecture at Ugarit is also familiar with this concept. Other good parallels from an urban context are the corbelled-vault tombs at Megiddo from the Middle Bronze Age II.¹⁰ At Megiddo the burial chambers are rectangular, TWE-A-00170 has an elliptical ground plan. The entire tomb is constructed with unworked stones and the burial chamber is vaulted as a dome. At Ugarit the Middle Bronze Age burial chambers are usually only partially vaulted and covered at the top with large stone slabs. The dromos is a small narrow passage, roofed with a single slab. The measurements of the construction are: burial chamber: length 2,65m, width 2,30m, height 1,5m; dromos: length 0,75m, width 0,40m, height 0,65m; shaft: diameter 0,90m, height 1,60m.

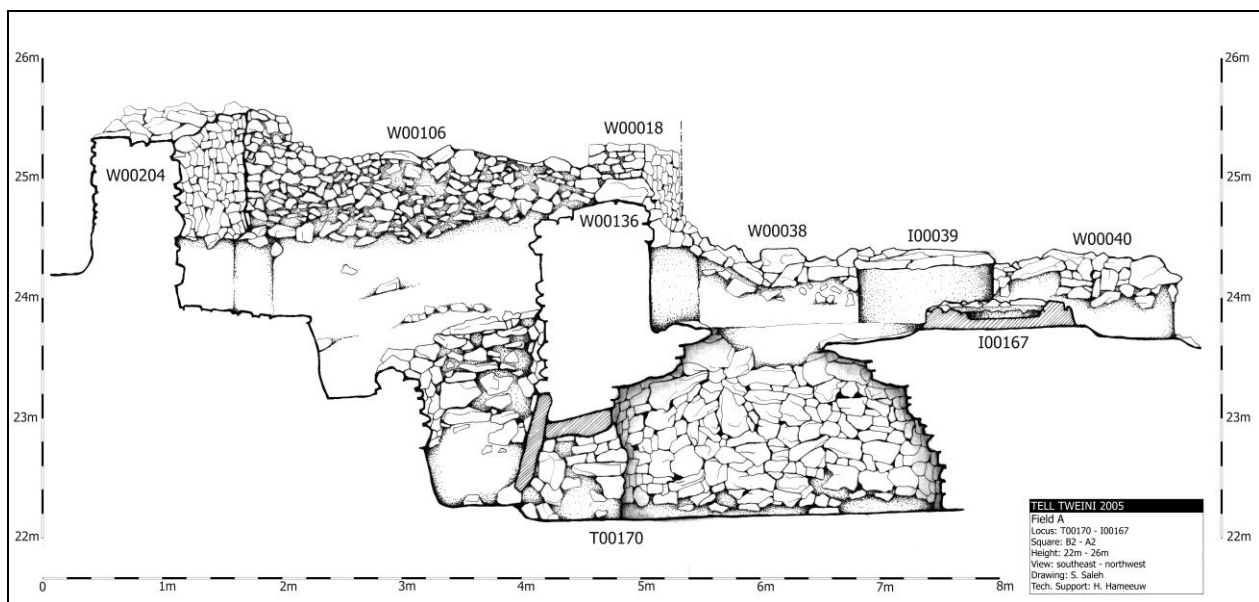
The intact collective grave contained the remains of at least 58 individuals, including 42 adults and 16 juveniles.¹¹ Some of the skeletal remains were stacked against the walls as in an ossuary (secondary inhumations?). Most of the inventory was deposited near the dromos entrance. The same practice was attested in the Middle Bronze Age Megiddo tombs. The grave goods consisted of a wide variety of ceramics (158), bronze objects (pins, needles, a knife and a ring), a cylinder seal, a figurine and beads. The

10. Kempinski 1989, 191 (fig. 48/1), 193 and Schumacher 1908, tables IV, VI. See also T.8096 from Tel Dan, David 1995, 122-124.

11. As a parallel we refer to the cursorily excavated Middle Bronze Age collective tomb (T.IV) from Tell Sukas. The shape of the tomb's construction is not known as it was excavated layer by layer in a small sounding, but its excavator speaks of "primitive walls of stones", of a pit being oval and measuring 2,70 by 1,90m. In between three successive periods of usage, fill layers were found, the tomb counted 41 skeletons, see Thrane 1978. The Levantine tradition of multiple successive interments in the same tomb is well known from Jericho, yet those tombs were not found in a domestic context but at cemeteries outside the town and they were cut into rocks, see Kenyon 1960 & 1965.

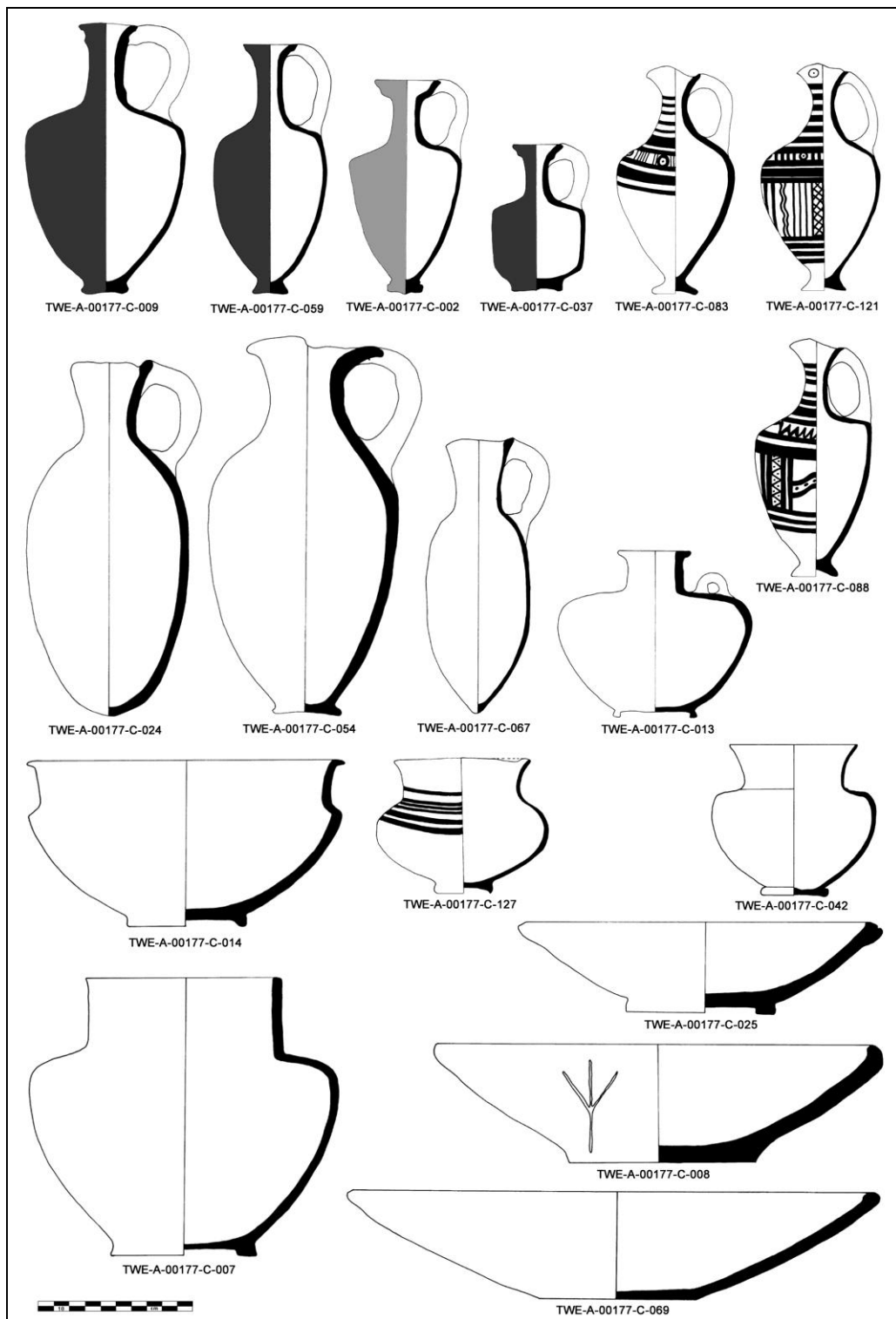
ceramics include red and black slipped juglets with a stepped rim profile, plates, dipper jugs, three jugs in White Painted Cross or Pendent Line Style and piriform jugs with pronounced shoulders and a small arched double-strand handle. All this material dates to the Middle Bronze Age II. The tomb entrance was situated directly beneath a stone floor (TWE-A-00197) and the tomb's orientation (shaft-south; chamber-north) runs parallel with the remaining foundations of a late Middle Bronze Age room.

Directly above the burial chamber, slightly to the north, the bottom of a white-plastered basin was preserved (TWE-A-00167). The soil around this basin was red. The relation between the tomb and the basin remains unclear (the practice of libations can be suggested).¹² No parallels for this feature, from e.g. Ugarit, are known to us. Noteworthy are the several drilled holes in the ends of the large cover slabs on top of the corbelled-vault burial chamber. These could relate to the 'libation' installation or these holes were structural elements for putting the largest slabs in place. A handle of a White Painted V jar was found in the fill of the shaft, indicating that the final use of the shaft took place towards the end of Middle Bronze Age II.

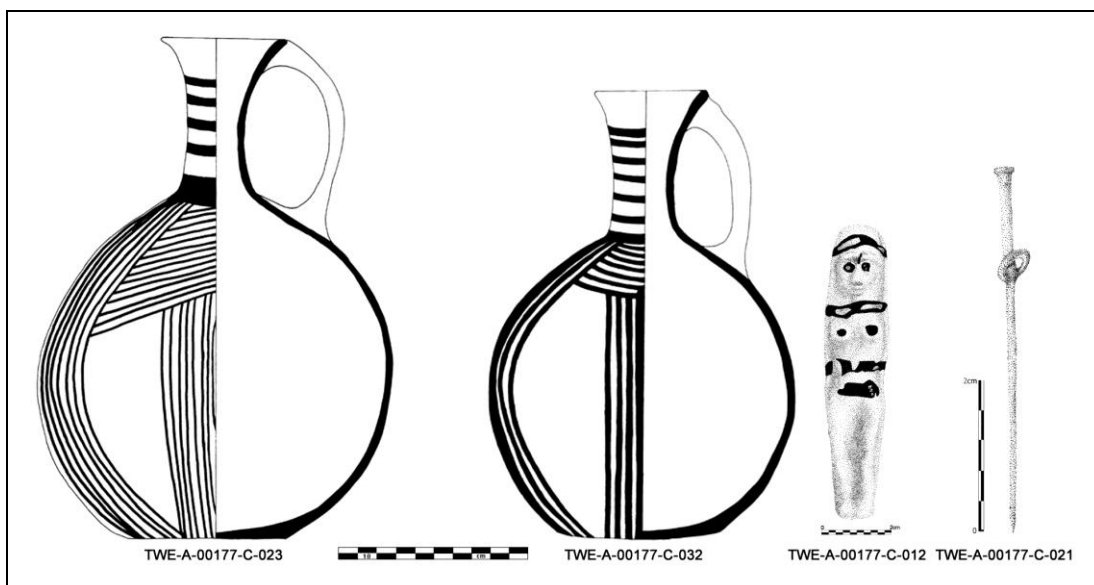


Ill. 7. Section drawing of TWE-A-00170, Middle Bronze Age II

12. Remarks on the practice of libations at Ugarit, see Salles 1995, 179-182 and Pitard 1994, 20-37. It should be stressed that no canalisation installations were found in the vicinity of TWE-A-00170.



III. 8. Selection of ceramics of tomb TWE-A-00170, Middle Bronze Age II



Ill. 9. Selection of inventory of tomb TWE-A-00170, Middle Bronze Age II

Late Bronze Age

TWE-A-00850

Up until now, funeral contexts of the Late Bronze Age have been rare at Tell Tweini. The small jar burial of a foetus is so far unique. A hole in floor TWE-A-00847 – constructed with flat stones – was used to put in the jar. The hole was repaired with a mixture of yellow plaster and small pebbles. The jar measured 50 by 21 by 17 cm. The body was laid on its side, with the legs pulled up slightly.

Iron Age

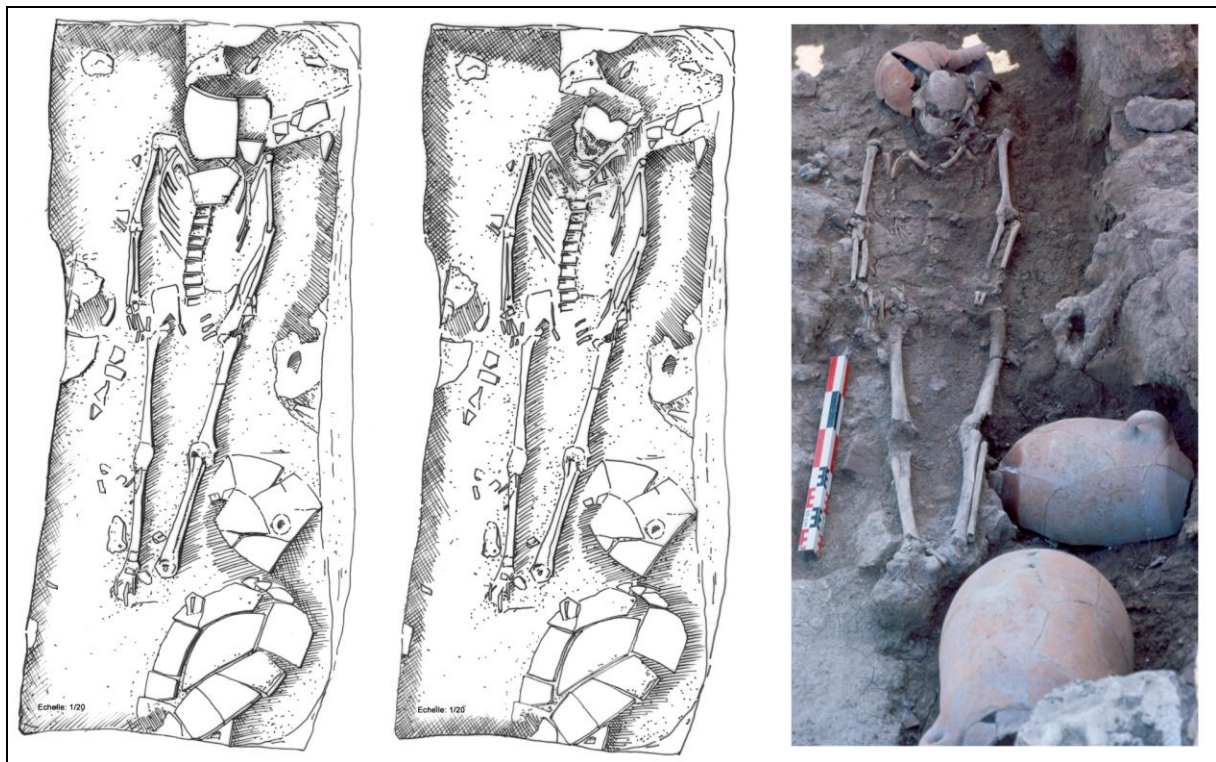
TWE-A-00126 (Ill. 10)

For the Iron Age, burials in an urban context are exceptional in Levantine archaeology. The simple earth burial, TWE-A-00126, was discovered in square B2 just beside wall TWE-A-00204 beneath a beaten earth floor. The well preserved skeleton had the same orientation as the wall. The body was that of a 35 to 45 year old woman measuring approximately 152 cm. The woman lay on her back, orientation east-west, with her hands crossed on the pelvis. On the face of the skull a large body sherd was positioned (TWE-A-00126-C-1-4, 7-10). It reflects a Levantine funeral practice, where ceramics were used to mask the face of the dead to shield it off from the earth during the interment.¹³ At the feet of the body two large peer-shaped storage jars (TWE-A-00126-C-012 and C-013)¹⁴ were placed as funerary gifts. On top of the protective sherd a bichrome barrel jug was positioned. The burial can be dated to the Iron Age II.

13. An example of this ancient practice was found in a Late Bronze Age tomb at Ras el-Bassit, see Courbin 1977-78, 30-31 and 39, fig. 18 and Darcque 1996, 131-33.

14. Similar peer-shaped storage jars have been found in an early Iron Age III tomb at Tell Arqa, Thalmann 1979, 73-77, 85-89.

The graves and tombs from Tell Tweini – Field A are all found in an urban context. It appears none of them were robbed, neither in antiquity nor in recent times. Their presence beneath domestic architecture must be seen as intentional. They demonstrate that the dead still played a role in the lives of their descendants. They testify to a close relation between the living and the dead. Burials within the boundaries of urban centres are more easily associated with ancestral worship while those at a distance from settlements are seen as territorial markers.¹⁵ The Iron Age grave of TWE-A-00126 forms an exception in this light. According to Levantine tradition, necropoles were created outside the city limits from the Iron Age on. TWE-A-00126 was found inside the city and in clear relation with a domestic structure. These burial grounds at the foot of Tweini are yet to be located. Little is known or can be presumed in the matter of mortuary practices. The white-plastered basin on the floor above TWE-A-00170 might suggest such practices, but is so far unique at Tweini. If mortuary practices were conducted in houses with burials, related objects could be expected. Unfortunately, until now, no such items could be distinguished among the excavated material.



Ill. 10. Tomb and inventory of TWE-A-00126, Iron Age II (Drawing by B. Verstraete)

15. Hallote 1995, 103-104.

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